



# RELIGIOUS NATURALIST ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

created by religious naturalists for religious naturalists

August 2023

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## News and Events

### IRAS Webinar: Taking Nature to Heart: The Religious Naturalist Orientation

*Thursday, September 7, 2023, 5 PM Eastern Time*

**Presenter:** Ursula Goodenough

### Presentation Overview:

Throughout the ages, religious traditions center themselves on a Large Story, a Mythos, transmitted in writings or in oral accounts, that tell How Things Are and Which Things Matter. These stories are embellished via art, ritual, and ceremony, and they serve, in Loyal Rue's phrase, to educate the social emotions that humans have inherited from our primate lineage. Scientific inquiry has generated what Rue has called Everybody's Story, the

13.8 billion year history of our evolving universe, planet, and living beings. A "vanilla" naturalist takes this story to mind. A religious naturalist also takes this story to heart, exploring its religious potential along spiritual and moral trajectories. I will develop these trajectories along the lines taken in my new book, *The Sacred Depths of Nature: How Life Emerged and Evolved*, [www.sacreddepthsofnature.com](http://www.sacreddepthsofnature.com), and describe the Religious Naturalist Association, [www.religious-naturalist-association.org](http://www.religious-naturalist-association.org), which seeks to introduce this orientation to others.

**The IRAS webinar is FREE but registration is required.**

**Please register using the link below.**

[Register for September 2023 Webinar](#)



# News & Events (continued)

## Religious Naturalism, Emergence, and Science: A Counterpoint Conversation

**Conversation Partners:** Ursula Goodenough and Terrence Deacon

**Wednesday, September 6, 2023**

19:00-20:30, CET

13:00-14:30 EST

10:00-11:30 PT

**Location:** Zoom

**Join Zoom Meeting**

<https://fiu.zoom.us/j/97004697462>

**Meeting ID:** 970 0469 7462



Ursula Goodenough



Terrence Deacon

Biologist Ursula Goodenough published the first edition of *The Sacred Depths of Nature* in 1998. The second edition, published in 2023 by Oxford University Press, is extensively revised to incorporate the many changes in science, culture, and planetary perspectives that have occurred over the last 25 years. She and neuroscientist Terrence Deacon have written extensively about the philosophical / evolutionary idea of emergence in nature, a form of materialism in which novel and more complex levels of organization and life emerge out of levels “below” them, a way of getting something else from nothing but. In this conversation, Deacon and Goodenough will talk about what has changed in the last 25 years, what the implications are for these changes in terms of thinking about some type of a “religious naturalist orientation,” and what all this might mean for the future of the planetary community in an era of climate change and the attendant environmental issues.

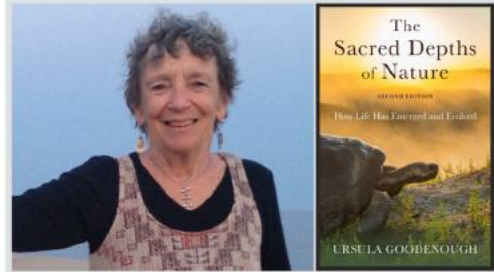
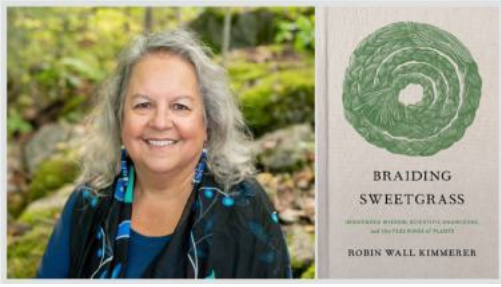
This Event is Free and Open to the Public

**Ursula Goodenough** is Professor of Biology Emerita at Washington University who retired to Martha’s Vineyard in 2017. She taught cell biology and evolution and engaged in research that focused on the sexual cycle of the green soil alga *Chlamydomonas*, on ciliary motility, and on algal biofuel precursors. She is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Microbiology Society, a member of the National Academy of Sciences, and served as president of the American Society for Cell Biology. She and many others are developing what is called [a religious naturalist orientation](#). A new edition of her book, [The Sacred Depths of Nature: How Life Emerged and Evolved](#) (Oxford University Press), describes her understandings of this orientation.

**Terrence W. Deacon** is Professor of the Department of Anthropology and member of the Helen Wills Neuroscience Institute at the University of California, Berkeley. His research combines developmental evolutionary biology and comparative neuroanatomy to investigate the evolution of human cognition, and is particularly focused on the explanation of emergent processes in biology and cognition. His acclaimed book, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Brain* (W. W. Norton & Co., 1997) was awarded the I. J. Staley Prize for the most influential book in Anthropology in 2005 by the School of American Research. His book, *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter* (W. W. Norton & Co., Spring 2011), explores the relationship between thermodynamic, self-organizing, evolutionary and semiotic processes and provides a new technical conception of information that explains both its representational and normative properties.

(more news on next page)

## News & Events



### Writing to Heal the Earth

Thursday, August 31st at 4:00PM  
On the Outdoor Stage at  
Featherstone Center of the Arts

This event is free, but kindly RSVP  
[Click here to RSVP](#)

Featherstone Center for the Arts welcomes Robin Wall Kimmerer, botanist and best-selling author of Braiding Sweetgrass, in conversation with Ursula Goodenough, biologist and author of The Sacred Depths of Nature as they discuss what it means to write about the earth during this time of climate crisis. The conversation will be moderated by Marc Favreau, Editorial Director of The New Press and author of Unequal: A Story of America, and will be followed by a brief Q&A and author signing.

### RNUU FB Group

The RNUU FB group will resume regular meetings in September. The first meetin will ber Sept. 28 atl 6:30 EDT.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89422158312>



## Song of the Month God Bless the Child by Billie Holiday

## Nature Image of the Month Anacondas Having a Ball

When anacondas mate, serveral competing males can form a ball around a female in a ritual that can last up to a month.



Photo Credit: National Geographic

## Video of the Month Why It Actually Might Be 'Survival of the Friendliest'



Scientists have found that being able to cooperate and form strong relationships is often essential to species survival, and it's seen when we examine the evolutionary success of our human ancestors, apes, and even our dogs. For that reason, some might say friendliness actually beats out fitness when it comes to survival

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaeA8qx4qrc>

## Article of the Month - August 2023

**Money** by Michael Cavanaugh

So far at least, RNA has never asked for money, and I won't be doing that in this newsletter. Instead I want to muse, in my role as Treasurer, about our history and culture regarding money.

Where to start? We had the great good fortune of beginning our existence at a time when money simply was not required, in any significant amount anyway, to do what we wanted to do. That was to find all the people out there who are religious naturalists, even if they don't know it yet, and bring us all together as an association. To do that we decided (thanks to the good advice of our Board of Advisors member V.V. Raman) not to have dues. That may be part of the reason we have now discovered members in 44 countries and all 50 US States.

Older associations had to have "bricks and mortar" buildings and a paid staff to do their work, but we have been SO fortunate to have dedicated volunteers to pursue our mission, and put together a world-class website that explains what it means to be a religious naturalist. To be sure, that takes a certain amount of money – two \$17.50 charges each year to keep the domain names current, and \$10 per year to keep our non-for-profit charter up to date. Occasionally we spend dedicated moneys for a project the officers and Board come up with, and once a year we pay a small amount for a Hospitality suite at a Chaplain's conference, because we are an "endorsing agency" for chaplains who are not supernaturalists and whose world-views align with ours. Oh, and lately we've decided to pay a monthly fee of \$30 to MailChimp so we can better manage the newsletter mailout. I may be forgetting something, but that \$500/year (approximately) is basically it.

Fortunately, some members have spontaneously sent money, sometimes \$100 or sometimes a smaller but regular amount, for which we are immensely grateful. So it works out. Indeed we have adequate funds on hand for our projected needs.

Those are the nuts and bolts, but it leaves open a huge number of more philosophical questions. Should we be doing projects we aren't currently doing that would cost money? Probably, but the limiting factor is much more likely to be coordinating dedicated volunteers than spending money. Should we be urging people to send money in anticipation of the day when a project presents itself that we wish we had funds for? Would people feel more involved if we provided more opportunities for giving? Should we start a dialogue to address these questions and propose other ones?

Finally, I should say we've discussed money from time to time among the officers and the Board, but we have never reached out to the membership to see what YOU think about money. To me that seems a big oversight. It would be great to know exactly what you think, not only about the thoughts and questions above but about a whole range of ideas – philosophical and practical – related to money. You can address them to me ([MichaelCav@aol.com](mailto:MichaelCav@aol.com)) or to any other officer or Board member, or throw out your ideas for general discussion on RNAnet or click the link below to post your comments on the RNA Forum. We (and in particular I) would love to hear your thoughts.

Cordially,  
Michael Cavanaugh,  
Treasurer

### Forum Topic of the Month RNA Finances

Here's another place to discuss Michael's questions:  
<https://religious-naturalist-association.org/forums/topic/rna-finances/>

## Book of the Month

**The Song of the Cell: An Exploration of Medicine and the New Human** by Siddhartha Mukherjee

Filled with writing so vivid, lucid, and suspenseful that complex science becomes thrilling, *The Song of the Cell* tells the story of how scientists discovered cells, began to understand them, and are now using that knowledge to create new humans.

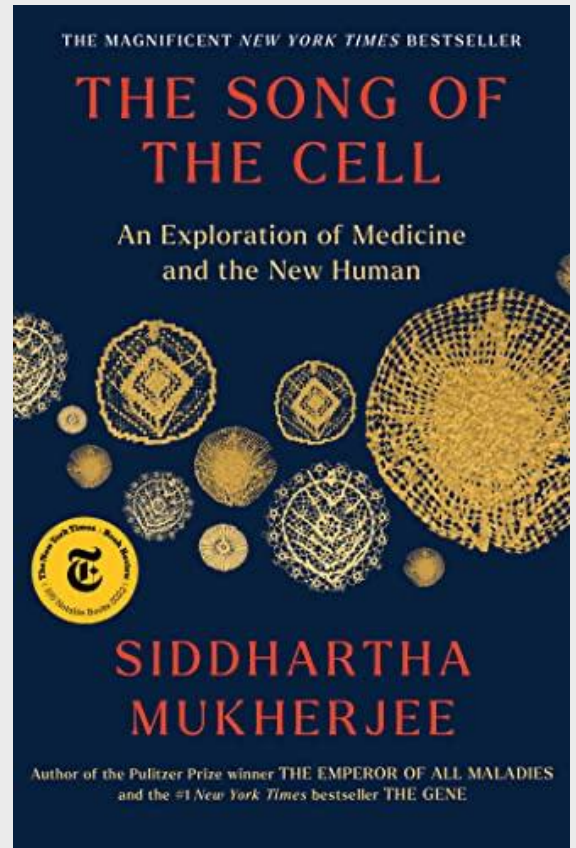
[https://www.amazon.com/Song-Cell-Exploration-Medicine-Human/dp/1982117354/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=1XG4Q5OBXAMUO&keywords=The+Song+of+the+Cell&qid=1690508482&sprefix=the+song+of+the+cell%2Caps%2C151&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Song-Cell-Exploration-Medicine-Human/dp/1982117354/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1XG4Q5OBXAMUO&keywords=The+Song+of+the+Cell&qid=1690508482&sprefix=the+song+of+the+cell%2Caps%2C151&sr=8-1)

## Members' Projects

The RNA website has a section called [Members' Projects](#). This page provides links to projects of RNA members. If you have a project related to RN that you would like included on this webpage please email a description to [projects@religious-naturalist-association.org](mailto:projects@religious-naturalist-association.org).

## RN Links

**Members Contributions:** Our members contribute sermons, articles, videos, music and other material related to the Religious Naturalist orientation. Go to <https://religious-naturalist-association.org/members-contributions/> to check them out. Please consider contributing your own material. There is a link on the page for submitting items.



Siddhartha Mukherjee

